

THE CORRESPONDENT.

MAGNA EST VERITAS ET PREVALEBIT.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

SPIRITS AND DEMONS.

Mr. Editor—There is a strange propensity in the human mind to prodigy; to whatever causes surprise or astonishment; and to admire what we do not understand. We are not affected by things which we frequently see. If we can trace but one link of the infinite chain of causes, our admiration ceases, though we are then as far from our journey's end as when we set out; for all the works of Nature appear miraculous until we have traced their origin. In this sense, every thing may be regarded a miracle though we ought to be no more surprised at seeing a blazing comet, which makes its revolution but once in 500 years, than in seeing the sun every day.

If one or two men affirm, that they saw another man leap twenty yards at one leap, there is no one who will believe this assertion. But if the same men say, that they actually saw in a churchyard a goblin, with saucer eyes and cloven feet, leap over the spire of the building, all the inhabitants of the town or village become so alarmed, that few of them will venture to go abroad in a dark night. The tale of an old woman inhabiting a cat, or flying in the air on a broomstick, sets them a staring, and staggers their incredulity. How often has it been said and believed, that spirits have appeared to discover lost silver spoons, hidden money, and sometimes murders that had been perpetrated in secret many years before. But we never hear of a tyrant, who, by private murders, has slaughtered thousands, and by public butcheries, destroyed millions of human beings—we never hear of such a one being dragged out of his court by good or evil spirits, as a terror to such monsters. Such an instance would have done more to convince the world of the existence of these governing spirits, and of their utility, than the testimony of all the pious men in the world, whatever may have been their rank or talents. If God thought fit to work by such instruments, and intended that we should believe in them, it is impossible to doubt that he would adopt the properest methods to command attention. But those wonder workers never performed any thing of real use, and we have no other evidence of their pretended supernatural communications, than the veracity of those to whom they are said to have been made, and who were liable to be deceived themselves, or disposed to invent falsehoods to deceive others. The proof ought always to be equal to the importance of the thing told; for when it is more probable that a man should tell a lie, or be deceived, than that a strange phenomenon should exist, there can be no difficulty to determine on which

side of the question truth is to be found. It is a melancholy fact, however, notwithstanding the clearness of these principles, that most men are so prepared by education to believe these stories, that they will repose the utmost confidence in them, on testimony which they would reject in the most ordinary concerns of life.

For many ages, the phenomena of meteors, eclipses, and comets, seemed unaccountable; and the causes of thunder and lightning were as unknown to the world as they are to the unlettered children of the forest, of the present day. Cannon were esteemed by the aborigines of this country to be angry deities—ships, floating monsters—the sun, to be the God of the world—watches, to be living animals—paper and ink, to be spirits, which conveyed men's thoughts from one to another; and a dancing mare was, little more than a century ago, burned for a witch by the Christian inquisitors of Portugal.

All Nature is in perpetual motion; and in the great variety of appearances which this occasions, some will seem very extraordinary, yet have as certain regular causes as the most obvious mechanic operations. We cannot penetrate into the internal frame and constitution of every thing. We have but a very slight knowledge of the principles and contexture of animal and vegetable beings; consequently we cannot know what Nature can spontaneously produce, or how she works. We see only the outside of things, and no more of them than what is necessary to our preservation or convenience. Nature also works by innumerable ways impenetrable to our vain and fruitless inquiries: the loadstone draws iron towards it; the sensitive plant shrinks from the touch; some plants attract, and twine round each other; while others avoid one another, and grow apart. There are many other surprising instances of the powers of matter and motion, that must have come under our observation; and, without doubt, there are numberless others of which we know nothing. But if these minute insignificant works of Nature cause so much astonishment, how ought we to be amazed at the greater productions? The earth itself is but a grain of sand in the visible world. What must it then be when compared with the immense bodies which the eye cannot reach? Is it not likely that the many fellow planets of our sphere, which move round the sun as we do, are filled with inhabitants, and not improbably with more valuable ones than ourselves. And is it not almost certain, that the numerous fixed stars nightly seen in the heavens, and the more numerous ones frequently discovered by the telescope, are so many different suns, with each a different system of worlds revolving round them, and receiving vital warmth and nourishment from their beams? We have not faculties to perceive and know things as they are, but only in such points of view as Nature has represented them. We have only talents suited to our wants; and here is our *ne plus ultra*—the farthest we can go. We may be sure that we are not obliged to know what is beyond our power to know. All such things are to us as non-entities.

There is no occasion to recur to supernatural causes, to account for what may be easily accounted for by our ignorance of natural ones—by the fraud or folly of others, or by imposing on ourselves. Which of our senses do not frequently deceive us? Strangling, or strong pressure of

the eyes, causes every thing to appear on fire; that of the ears makes us hear noises; straight things in the water appear crooked. Bodies, by reflection or refraction, seem otherwise, and in other places than they are in nature. All things appear yellow to the jaundiced; melancholy and enthusiastic persons fancy themselves to be glass bottles, knives, and tankards. Madmen often believe that they are gods or princes, and almost always see spirits; and one of your reverend parsons, a few years ago, in England, thought himself far gone in pregnancy, and could not be persuaded to the contrary, till a man midwife pretended to deliver him of a false conception.

In fevers and malignant distempers, people see visions and apparitions of angels, devils, dead men, or whatever else their fancy renders most agreeable or terrible. In dreams all men see, or suppose they see, such false appearances. Their imaginations in sleep are often so lively and vigorous, that they can scarcely be persuaded of their mistake when they are awake, and would not be so if they did not find themselves in bed. If a credulous, timid, or melancholy person should carelessly fall asleep in his closet or garden, and imagine he saw a representation of an angel, demon, or dead man speaking to him, and waking on a sudden without observing that he had been asleep, (which frequently happens,) I cannot see how he should distinguish this appearance or phantom from a real vision or revelation.

Notwithstanding the obvious absurdity of attributing these occurrences to supernatural agency, we every where find men resisting the light, and strenuously maintaining that there are such beings as devils, who play hide and seek on earth; who are permitted to run up and down, and divert themselves by seducing ignorant men and women—entering into cats—making noises, and playing monkey tricks in churchyards and empty houses, or any where else but in empty heads. But the advocates for Satan's empire are not very consistent with themselves. They give the chief of these demons the power of working miracles—make him prince of the air—lord of the hidden minerals—wise, rich, and powerful, as well as false, treacherous, and wicked; and are presumptuous enough to bring him on the stage as a rival for empire with the Almighty; while at the same time they put a fool's coat and cap on him, and make him play all manner of antics, though with all his cunning he has not for the last eighteen hundred years invented one new trick, but goes on in the same dull road; for there is scarcely a story told of a spirit, witch, ghost, or hobgoblin, who has played pranks during the whole of that period, but we have the same story in Cicero's treatise on divination. "Glanville on Witches," and "Satan's Invisible World Discovered," books held in high estimation among Christians, are substantially the same as the work of Cicero, who, himself, borrowed his ideas of demonology from the ancients.

To be continued.

PROFESSORS AND BELIEVERS.

Sir—Your paper has been received, and is of a character highly satisfactory. Such works are very much wanted; and there must have been a greater degree of moral courage among those who have organized the

"Free Press Association," than I had expected in any of our citizens. It is a great daring for an individual to express freely his own opinions upon the falsehood, folly, and mischievous effects of what is called *revealed religion*, to one of his friends, without a thought of publishing or propagating them; and it has even become fashionable for those who disbelieve every word of it, to be the most zealous and munificent supporters of "public worship," of priests, theological seminaries, bible societies, missions, and all the machinery and craft by which the clergy are aiming to enthrall the human mind in this otherwise free country, and to draw from the labors of others the means of living in luxury and ease. Ask them why they do so? They answer, "Because there is no better way of keeping the ignorant multitude in order!" "The people of all countries," they say, "have had some kind of religion, and if you destroy that of the bible, they would have something else."

The conformity of such men to the popular customs of the country in this matter, saves them from a great deal of abuse, obloquy, and persecution from the dominant bigots; but it is, in fact, the real cause of sustaining and perpetuating one of the greatest evils that ever afflicted the human race. Their consenting to, and sinister support of what they know to be false, rather than to take the hazard and trouble of opposing and exposing it, does more, in the direct estimate of the aggregate means of keeping it in existence, than all the exertions of all the priests in our country.

This assertion is a bold one, and will not be credited at first; but let any man travel through this state, or even the state of "steady habits," and take a census of the professors, and another of the non-professors—let him go into almost any congregation, count these two classes, and ascertain, with the certainty of omniscience, who believe the "fish stories" in earnest, and who do not, and he will find a large majority of the *men*, the directors and payers in public matters, who do *not* believe a syllable of the nonsense they support. In the congregations within my knowledge, not one in five are professors, and not more than half those are in reality believers; and among the men of education and talents, I do not know one in fifty that believe, whatever their professions may be; and the pecuniary support derived from non-professors within my acquaintance, is at least as four to one.

Now, if all this was withheld, or applied to the purposes of a rational and useful education of the rising generation, how long, think you, would the professors hold out and support their devil, their hell, their priests, and their missionary, tract, and bible societies? Suppose all the non-professors—(and I cannot imagine how a *believer* can a moment be a non-professor; for who in his senses, believing that "whosoever shall be ashamed to confess Christ before men, of him shall Christ be ashamed in the day of judgment," and that he will certainly be cast into a lake of "fire and brimstone," to roast alive (not dead) to all eternity, could dare to delay a single moment to make a public profession?)—I say, suppose all the non-professors, who are consequently unbelievers, were to lay out as much money—have as many preachers—take as much pains—control as absolutely all the sources of education, and direct them as assiduously to the suppression of Christianity, and the establishment and sup-

port of "Natural Religion," or philosophy and truth, as the professors and supporters of Christianity now do for exactly the contrary purposes, how long would there be a Christian priest in this country?

There is nothing wanting but *concert* and *courage* among the friends of truth and liberty to effect a radical cure for the evils arising from priestcraft. There is, indeed, a sad mistake fast fixed in the minds of many otherwise correct thinking men. I can exemplify my view of it by stating a single fact. A very sensible man of my acquaintance went a few days ago to hear a real blue-light, revival-making Calvinist preach an ordination sermon. He returned laughing, and repeated several passages of the sermon; such for instance as "the certainty that God has fixed an eternal place of infinite punishment for sinners, and the never ending view of it through all eternity, should now, with Christians, and will hereafter, constitute one of the highest sources of gratulation and happiness with all the saints and angels in the paradise of God—that *moral* discourses from the pulpit are worse than useless—that God had determined before the foundation of the world, who should be elected to salvation, and who should be passed over, and reprobated to that awful, eternal punishment." I asked him if he believed such stuff? "No," said he, "but I support it because it is the only way you can keep the *raggamuffins* in order. The more brimstone a priest deals out, the better I like him." "Abominable!" said I—"How came these *raggamuffins*? Have they not been made so by your *brimstone* system? How came *you* better than they, and less in need of these out-pourings of your favorite brimstone? Was it not because you, some way or other, got above believing such detestable trash? Suppose you take as much pains to instruct them in *truth* and *sound philosophy*, as is now taken to impress a belief in such unnatural, revolting, unavailing nonsense as you have been hearing, how long would they bear the character of *raggamuffins*?"

Such papers as yours are calculated to rectify such mistakes, and I wish it success.

Yours truly,

HISTORY OF SAMUEL.

Continued from No. 25, Vol. 1.

The return of the ark to the Hebrews is, of course, attended with prodigies; but they prove more the want of judgment in the narrator than the credulity of the people. This writer asserts, that in one village alone, where curiosity induced the peasants to look into the ark, God struck with death 50,000 of these inquisitive people. In the sacerdotal style, it is always God who slays and exterminates; but as there is not, and never has been, a village with 50,000 inhabitants, and even not 3000, it is clear that we must suppress several zenos, and perhaps all. The object of our Levite is to frighten the vulgar, and stifle that spirit of research and examination which is the dread of impostors and charlatans. The ark was deposited in the village of Gabaa, where it remained peaceable for twenty years. At the death of Eli, Samuel was twenty-

two or twenty-four; he was now, then, forty-two or forty-four, in the vigor of mind and maturity of judgment. How had he passed this long interval? The book does not inform us; it is a dry chronicle, a true skeleton, despoiled of its ligaments. But the result proves that it has not missed its time: circumstances were embarrassing. The Hebrews, overwhelmed by two bloody defeats, had neither moral nor military energy. The enemy, master of the country, watched all their movements. Their jealousy would not permit them even to have smiths, lest they should manufacture arms. Policy burthened them with tribute of all kinds, and divided them by perfidious preferences.

Samuel retired into his native country, where, having carried his reputation of a prophet, he could not fail to have enemies. Where is one less a prophet than in his own country? It was necessary to calm the passions of his countrymen; to deceive foreign emissaries; to dissemble his credit, his capacity; and, moreover, to prepare the means to throw off an insupportable yoke by an unlooked for and successful revolt. At the end of the twenty years mentioned, this revolt breaks out. Suddenly the cry is heard to assemble the Hebrews to the camp of Mispheh, where the Philistines soon arrive to oppose them. In war, one of the first means of success is confidence in the man who commands, especially if he has not the practice or art of fighting. Here there was nothing but the peasants raised *en masse*, exactly as is done yet among the Druze. In such men, confidence arises from the idea which the talents of their chief and the excellence of their position inspires. Samuel, who had the choice of these means, already had a great advantage. The locality of Mispheh, on the edge of a plain, cut up into ravines and hillocks, put it into his power to accept or refuse battle. Thus posted, it was evident he waited the favorable moment. He knew the extreme superstition of both combatants. A prodigy was necessary; an omen similar to those of all ancient people. He examines around him; he perceives in the atmosphere the indication of a storm; the attendants press him to entreat God in favor of the chosen people; he announces a sacrifice; he immolates a lamb; he invokes Jehuh with loud outcries; the Philistines begin the attack; the thunder roars; the Jews are persuaded that God answers to the priest; they charge with energy, and the enemy is beaten. Such is the substance of chapter 7, clothed with the probabilities omitted by the narrator. The success of this day was such that the conquered Philistines gave up the districts which they had so long retained, and ceased troubling the Hebrew people whom they governed.

Here commences the judgeship of Samuel; the exercise of that power to which he had so long aspired. The victory of Mispheh put him in a new and better situation. But we must not be deceived. In a democratic state, as was that of the Hebrews; among a people composed of peasants, spread over a country intersected with mountains, woods, and ravines, where each family lived on its property; where there existed neither municipal subordination, nor organized military force, nor even a town of 6000 inhabitants, it is evident the exercise of power is submitted to a divided opinion, susceptible of many vicissitudes. Superstition was the general and common bond; but this superstition is not always

an obstacle to the contest of interests and passions. In such a state of things, it cannot be denied that Samuel governed with prudence and talent, since the whole of his administration was peaceable within and without. The proof of this is, that the narrator tells us Samuel did not cease to judge, and that, becoming old, he made his children judges with him, to prepare them to succeed him. This duration (not expressed) comprehends twenty years, which makes Samuel sixty-two or sixty-four years old when, contrary to his wish, he was forced to nominate a king.

This step, which the divine foresight of Samuel did not anticipate, was caused by the base conduct of his children, who, like those of Eli, found the secret to irritate and scandalize the people by their vexations, their debaucheries, and their impiety. Here we see the general operation of perverted nature, which, without ever profiting by example and experience, always falls into the same circle of habits, the same passions. The fathers arrive at power by much toil and trouble; the children, born in abundance, and a wrong direction given to their passions, abandon themselves to vicious practices and habits. Nevertheless, it is believed that, on this occasion, the discontent of the multitude was nourished by the secret opposition of powerful families, perhaps sacerdotal, who were shocked to have for chief and master a man of low origin, an upstart. Among the Druze and Arabs of the present day, this prejudice about ancient, rich, and noble families, has a great influence on popular opinion. At the time of which we speak, a conspiracy was evidently formed; for, according to the historian, a deputation from the sages of Israel came to find Samuel, at his paternal residence at Ramatha, to demand from him a king—a royal government constituted like that of the neighboring people, to whose example generally his attention was directed. The answer which he gave to this deputation, and the details of his conduct in this affair, disclose the anger of disappointed ambition, of a pride deeply wounded. It was necessary for him to bend to force, to yield to necessity. But we shall see him in the execution exhibit a cunning intellect even to perfidy, which, by its analogy to the adventures in the temple, his pretended visions and nocturnal revelations, discovers all his character.

They forced Samuel to name a king. He might, he ought to have chosen the man the most capable by his talents and by his resources, to fill this eminent post. But this he avoided. Such a man would reign by himself, and not obey him. A docile subject was necessary. He sought him in a family of low degree, without adherents, but having that exterior which would impose on the people. His choice was that of one who, having just enough sense necessary to transact ordinary business, was constantly under the necessity of recurring to a benefactor, who could preserve a strict hand over him. Samuel, in a word, selected a handsome man of war, who should possess the executive, and be his lieutenant, while he would continue to hold the legislative reigning power. Here is the secret of all the conduct which we shall see him pursue in the elevation of Saul, in the disgrace of this king, and in the substitution of David, another trait of sacerdotal machiavelism.

There was a man in the tribe of Benjamin named Kish, large and strong. His son, named Saul, was the handsomest among the children

of Israel; he was taller by a head than ordinary. It happened one day that the asses of Kish were lost. He said to his son, take a servant and go and seek them. Saul traversed the mountains of Ephraim; then the country of Shalisha, without finding them; then the country of Shalim and that of Temini, when he came to that of Zuph, where Samuel lived.

Saul wished to return, but his servant said to him, There is in this district a man of God much respected; all that he says comes to pass; let us consult him; he will enlighten us. Saul answered, We have nothing to give him. I have about me, says the servant, a quarter of a shekel of silver, (40 sous or pennies) I will give it to the seer; for then, says the text, they called seer (*rah*) what now is called prophet (*nabia*.)

In these times of ignorance and of rustic credulity, the Hebrews partook with the Greeks of Homer, and the Romans of Numa, and with all the people of antiquity, the belief in divines, in the tellers of oracles and good fortune, and that Samuel was one of those divines. Our biblists try in vain to point out a difference between the divination of the Jews and that of the pagans (*i. e.* paysaus or peasants.) These are subtleties without foundation. Customs, as well religious as civil, were the same. The books of the Jews furnished proof, at each page, of being continually reproached for idolatry by their own writers. This desire, in fact, to know the future, so predominant in the human heart—that knavish art of taking advantage of credulity to make money—are epidemic diseases, which have not ceased to reign throughout all antiquity. See the picture drawn by Cicero in his curious book on divination: see how, under the name of Atticus, he depicts not the common people only, but governors and philosophers prejudiced with this belief, and maintaining it with arguments which shake, even at this day, many people who laugh at it. How should this superstition not have prevailed in former times, when among us, in the midst of our sciences and the numerous classes of enlightened men by which we are surrounded, it is not extinct? In Italy, Switzerland, and France, they continue to consult the sorcerer, when the villages are filled with drawers of cards; and even in the heart of the capitals there still exist diviners and divinesses, seers, male and female, who are consulted by the rich as well as by the poor, by the clergy as by the laity. We need not be astonished, then, that among the Jewish mountaineers this predilection was general, habitual, and even authorized; for it is seen that their king, Saul, consulted a fortuneteller, a true delphic Pythias, to make Samuel appear. In the time of Jeremiah, king Josiah and the priests went to consult the fortuneteller Holdah. It would be a useful and curious work to treat anew, and to the bottom, the subject of diviners, oracles, ghosts, and ærial spirits. In the last century, the learned, such as Van Dale of Holland, and Fontenelle of France, merely glanced at it. It might enlarge on the proceedings and management of the ancient servants and agents of the temples—on the system of knavery generally adopted by the ministers of worship of all sects; a source of reflection which this age, notwithstanding its pride, shows still the necessity. But I must not lose sight of my subject:—let us return to Saul and his servant on the road to consult the seer.

To be continued.

TRIUMPH OF TRUTH.

Continued from No. 23, Vol. 1.

28. It is a fact, that the "*firmaments*" mentioned by Moses have the most absurd and contradictory definitions ever used by any mortal; and bear incontestible evidence that such random guesses never could proceed from any God. For in the sixth verse Moses says, "And God said let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters." 7th, "And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament, and it was so." It is a perfect chaos, without any form or fixture, either in Heaven, on earth, or under the earth. For, in the 6th verse, he places it in the *midst of the waters*; in the 7th we find another *under the waters*; and in a third *above the waters*; and in the 8th verse we have another in the *heavens*; and in the 15th and 17th verses we find it again described as a part of the *heaven*; and lastly, in the 20th verse, we find it *very near the earth*; for it is there described to be, where the *fowl may fly above the earth*, in the open *firmament of heaven!!!*

29. It is a fact, that as none of our fowls fly higher than about one mile, so it follows, that this "firmament" of Moses must rest on this earth.

30. It is a fact, that Moses has provided a "*heaven*" for his "*fowls*," but none for his countrymen; nor even a hell for the wicked!

31. It is fact, that Moses says, in the 12th verse, "And God said, let the earth bring forth grass," &c. Now it would, at least, have been a little more rational, as well as creditable, to have made the earth produce "grass," &c. after the creation of the sun, instead of before it.

32. It is a fact, that Moses declares, in the 14th verse, "And God said, let there be lights in the firmament, the heaven, to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons, and for days and for years." But, the truth is, those "lights" do not "*divide*" the day from the night, because that days and nights are produced by the diurnal rotations of the earth on its own axis! and as to the "lights" in the heaven, they were created for nobler purposes than for "signs or seasons," or for "days and years."

33. It is a fact, that Moses informs you, in the 16th verse, "That God made two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: he made the stars also." When the truth is, the greater part of this verse is composed of palpable falsehoods! For it is manifest to every competent judge, that whether we confine the narrative to the universe or to our own solar system, it is still nothing but falsehoods. To a man of Moses's ignorance, his story of "two great lights" will, no doubt, prove satisfactory; but those who have read the first rudiments of geography or astronomy, will pronounce it a tissue of childish guesses, founded on the apparent size of the moon with those stars which were too trifling to attract the farther attention of Moses. When the fact is, that every fixed star is believed to be so many thousand times larger than one of his "two great lights."

34. It is a fact, that if Moses had been really "inspired" by God, he would have taught these pretended prophets the truth, instead of falsehoods; or is it easier for God to teach them lies, than the pure truth?

35. It is a fact, that Moses declares, in the 17th verse, "And God set them in the firmament of the heaven, to give light upon the earth." Those who believe, with Moses, that our earth is the greatest and most important sphere in the universe, have some excuse at least for imagining that the sun, moon, and all the stars, are only creations of a second day order, and merely intended as so many lamps, to attend the movements of this great earth.

36. But it is a fact, which every philosopher or man of reading believes, that all the fixed stars are suns as large as our own, and created for far nobler purposes than to "give light" to our speck of earth.

37. It is a fact, that Moses says, in the 26th verse, "And God said, let us make man in our own image, after our own likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowls of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth." (27th v.) "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him, male and female created he them." But these two verses have opened a wide field for controversy, as well as for conjectures: both are to the meaning of the plural number, as also that of "image." For a while some have contended for a plurality of Gods; the greater part of Christians, with equal propriety, perhaps, have insisted that it was God the Father consulting with God, no God, the Son, and God, no God, the Holy Ghost! But it is evident, from all the writings of Moses, that he believed his God had a visible form, and that it resembled that of man; and also that God had created great angels after the same "image." It is therefore highly probable that when Moses made God use the plural, "Let us make man in our own image," &c. he did not intend to represent him as consulting with any one; but merely as announcing his will and pleasure, and calling on them to witness the creation.

To be continued.

NEW-YORK, SATURDAY, JULY 28, 1827.

We commence the second volume of the *Correspondent* under highly favorable circumstances. When we projected the work, there were but few of our friends who did not entertain doubts as to its success.—The influence of the clergy was so predominant, and a *profession* of religion had become so fashionable and indispensable, that any attempt to give another direction to popular opinion was considered a hopeless task. Notwithstanding these unfavorable appearances, we never for a single moment entertained any apprehensions as to the result. We had for many years observed the rapid advance of knowledge, and had the best reasons for believing, that even among those who, from interested motives, or a want of moral courage, allowed themselves to be borne along with the tide, there were many, very many, who cherished liberal

principles, and who felt disposed to aid in any prudent measure which might render them more generally known.

Even had no opposition existed, our success would have been viewed as unexpected; but having had to combat with deep rooted prejudices, with the bitter assaults of an enslaved and unprincipled press, and, above all, with the secret machinations of a powerful, interested, and arrogant priesthood, the advantage ground on which we now stand, may be regarded as a triumph of no ordinary magnitude.

If inducements had been wanting to stimulate us to exertion, nothing could have done this more effectually than the numerous letters we have received, approbating the temperate manner in which we have exposed the futile arguments of our opponents, and carefully avoided the acrimonious language with which they have assailed us. In pursuing a course so gratifying to our numerous patrons, we cannot but felicitate ourselves on having redeemed the pledge which we gave in our prospectus, that "no illiberal discussions or personalities would be permitted to pollute our columns; and that it should be our constant aim to establish a character for temperate and sober reasoning, for open investigation, and for universal conciliation."

Being now relieved from many difficulties that attended the publication of the *Correspondent*, we shall be the more able to continue our labors with unabated, if not increased zeal—confidently relying on the unremitting cooperation of the friends of truth in our attempt to rescue mankind from their present state of mental bondage. If, by the limited means that have hitherto been employed in attacking the hydra Superstition, the head of that monster has already been sensibly wounded, may we not expect, from an increase of strength directed towards the same object, that the victory will be speedily consummated?

* * * From arrangements now making, we shall soon be in a condition not only to print, without interruption or inconvenience, our own paper, and every thing calculated to promote the objects of the *Free Press Association*, but also to execute, on liberal terms, and in a satisfactory manner, all kinds of printing with which we may be favored.—We have already announced, that subscribers who intend binding the *Correspondent*, can have this done to any pattern, by sending to the office of publication, corner of Vesey street and Broadway.

The Antidote.—The Editors of this paper will find themselves mistaken, if they suppose that we could be diverted from our purpose, either by their rant, their railing, or their misrepresentations. Why persist in vaunting about "the efficacy of that glorious law of revelation," as they call the bible, when the question, not only as to its *divine authority*, but as to its *authenticity* remains unsettled? We are not disposed to admit that these points have been set at rest by any writer that ever existed.—We conceive ourselves as capable of investigating the subject as any of those champions of Christianity on whose opinions the conductors of the *Antidote* place so much reliance. We care not a fig for high sounding names or authorities, when the matter at issue is as capable of proof,

and as much a subject of inquiry at this day, as it was eighteen hundred years ago; at which period those who are said to have been eye witnesses of the transactions, treated them as unworthy of notice, and the actors as impostors and knaves. The result of our investigations, during a long series of years, has been that the Christian religion, as well as all other religions now professed, except the religion of Nature, have originated in craft, and are supported by fraud. Our opponents, instead of meeting the question fairly, would, good pious souls, have us to believe, *on their word*, that our conclusions have been erroneous; and because we do not possess "poorness of spirit" sufficient to induce us to renounce our faculties, and to become vassals of the church, they consider themselves privileged to denounce us as heirs of hell, and children of the devil. "Take care (say they) gentlemen, Deists; there is a pit before you; look out in time, or you will fall therein; that is to say, in plain scriptural language, He that believeth not *shall be damned*." Such is the language; such the sum total of all the arguments of these "advocates of truth," when we call on them to *prove* the *truth* of their system.

But this is not all: these very "honest," very "pious," and very "conscientious" Christians, feel no hesitation in *distorting* facts, when they find they cannot combat them by fair argument. We could point out several instances of this dereliction from principle, if our limits would permit. For the present, we shall notice one in their 8th No. which they have unblushingly repeated in their 9th. They charge us with having at one time *denied* the existence of David, king of Israel, and at another time, of having *admitted* his existence. That we did dispute the validity of the evidence offered to prove the existence of this "royal rebel, robber, and murderer," we readily admit. But that we ever expressed an opinion to the contrary, we utterly deny. In page 347 of the *Correspondent* we remarked, "But admitting, *for the sake of argument*, that there was such a personage as king David, and that the story told of him in the bible is true, we feel no difficulty in being able, on that evidence alone, to support the charge of his having been 'an unnatural monster,' and that his whole history was stained with acts of the most savage barbarity." Aware that we had succeeded in demonstrating all this, the Editors of the *Antidote*, in place of honestly acknowledging the fact, turn round upon us with the charge of having been guilty of *contradiction*, when it must have been evident to every impartial mind, that our reasoning was merely *hypothetical*. Yet these are the men who set themselves up as "*honest*" champions of the truth, as "*impartial* defenders" of a religion which, they say, is *purity* itself, and which they have voluntarily come forward to protect against what they choose to call the "poison of infidelity." Could a better proof be offered of the Christian religion having originated in fraud and imposture, than when we find its most "zealous" defenders of the present day resorting to such base and unjustifiable means to prevent its overthrow?

Ecce Homo!—This work (complete) is now on sale at the office of the Correspondent, corner of Vesey street and Broadway, and at the bookstore corner of Reed and Greenwich streets; price 75 cents, in boards. A liberal deduction will be given on quantities purchased for distribution.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THOUGHTS ON RELIGION, BY M. DIDEROT.

Doubts in religious matters, far from being blameable—far from being acts of impiety, ought to be regarded as praiseworthy, when they proceed from a man who humbly acknowledges his ignorance, and arise from the fear of offending God by the abuse of reason.

To admit any conformity between the reason of man, and the eternal reason of God, and to pretend that God demands the sacrifice of human reason, is to maintain that God wills one thing, and intends another thing at the same time.

When God, of whom I hold my reason, demands of me to sacrifice it, he becomes a mere juggler that snatches from me what he pretended to give.

If I renounce my reason, I have no longer a guide—I must then blindly adopt a *secondary principle*, and the matter in question becomes a supposition.

If *reason* be a gift of Heaven, and we can say as much of *faith*, Heaven has certainly made us two presents not only incompatible, but in direct contradiction to each other. In order to solve the difficulty, we are compelled to say either that faith is a chimera, or that reason is useless.

Pascal, Nicole, and others, have said, that God will punish with eternal torments the faults of a guilty father upon all his innocent offspring; and that this is a proposition *superior* to reason, and not in *contradiction* to it; but what shall we propose as being contradictory to reason if such blasphemy as this is not so?

Bewildered in an immense forest during the night, and having only one small torch for my guide, a stranger approaches, and thus addresses me:—"Friend, blow out thy light, if thou wouldst make sure of the right path." This stranger was a priest.

If my reason be the gift of Heaven, it is the voice of Heaven that speaks; shall I hearken to it?

Neither merit nor demerit is applicable to the judgment of our rational faculties, for all the submission and good will imaginable could not assist the blind man in perception of colors.

I am compelled to perceive evidence where it is, or the want of evidence where it is not, so long as I retain my senses; and if my judgment fails me, it becomes a *misfortune*, not a *sin*.

The Author of Nature would not reward me for having been a *wit*: surely, then, he will not *damn* me even for being a *fool*. Nay, more; he will not *damn* me even for being wicked. Is not my own conscience a sufficient punishment for me?

Every virtuous action is accompanied with an inward satisfaction: every criminal action with chagrin and remorse. The mind acknowledges without shame its repugnance to such, or such propositions, although there is neither virtue nor vice in the belief or disbelief of them.

If grace be necessary to belief, let us wait till that grace be sent us from above.

God surely will not punish us for the want of that which it has not pleased him to bestow upon us. You tell me to ask this grace in prayer, but is not grace necessary to assist me in asking for *faith*, the want of which I cannot discover by the light of reason?

The true religion, interesting the whole human race at all times and in all situations, ought to be eternal, universal, and self-evident; whereas the religions pretended to be revealed, having none of these characteristics, are consequently demonstrated to be false.

The miracles of which only a few men are said to have been witnesses, are insufficient to prove the truth of a religion that ought to be believed by the whole world.

The pretended facts with which all revealed religion is supported are *ancient* and *wonderful*; that is to say, the most suspicious evidence possible, to prove things the most incredible; for to prove the truth of the Gospel by a miracle, is to prove an absurdity by a contradiction in nature.

Is it quite certain that the God of the Christians is the true God? It appears that the devil is a much more powerful being, seeing that the number of the damned is so much greater than that of the elect.

The Son of God died purposely to vanquish the devil. In order to gain his point he was reduced to the necessity of dying, and yet the devil has ever since had the ascendancy. How then are we benefitted by the death of the Son of God?

The God of the Christians, for an apple, punished all the human race, and killed his own son. This only proves that God is a father who makes a great deal to do about his apples, and cares very little for his children.

A God that killed God to appease God, was an expressive phrase of La Hontan; a phrase of itself sufficient to destroy the Christian religion; a phrase that will still retain its absurdity should one hundred folio volumes be written to prove it rational.

But what will God do to those who never heard of the death of his son? or who, having heard of him, still remained unbelievers? Will he punish the deaf for not hearing? Will he torment the weak headed for not understanding an inconceivable absurdity?

Why are the miracles of Jesus Christ true, and those of Esculapius, Pythagoras, and Appolonius false?

All the Jews at Jerusalem who saw the great miracles of Jesus, were doubtless converted? By no means. So far from having any belief in him, they put him to death. These Jews (whom a God himself came to convert) must have been a very stiff-necked race. We have in every country seen the people drawn aside and deceived by a single false miracle, and yet all the true miracles of Jesus made very little impression on the minds of the Jews. The miracle of their incredulity is no doubt wonderful. However, our priests reply, that this obstinacy of the Jews had been predicted as a chastisement from Heaven. In that case, why did God work so many miracles when the futility of them had been foreseen?

It is morally certain that Cæsar existed. The existence of Jesus is as certain as the existence of Cæsar. It is thence inferred that the resurrection of Jesus is also certain; but the conclusion is false: the existence

of Cæsar was not miraculous; wherefore should the existence of Jesus be thought so?

The religion of Jesus, announced by ignorant fanatics, (who were easily deceived, or easily deceived others,) made the first Christians. The same religion now preached by learned men, continues to make unbelievers.

You tell me that these ignorant apostles suffered death to prove the truth of what they preached to mankind; instead of which they proved only their own enthusiasm, or the chastisement of the people on whom they practised their hypocrisy. To suffer martyrdom in any cause proves nothing, except that our party is not the most powerful.

How did it happen that God permitted to be put to death those men that he sent purposely to convert the world? Would it not have been more in conformity with the divine attributes to change the hearts of the people?

As for the martyrs who suffered after the time of the apostles, they were not witnesses of the miracles of Jesus; they died to maintain that those who had instructed them in the Christian religion had neither deceived themselves nor wished to deceive others.

We attest what we have ourselves seen, or what we believe we have seen. When we attest what others have seen, we prove nothing except that we are willing to believe them on their words. The whole fabric of Christianity is built on the authority of those who had formerly an interest in establishing it, and who now have an interest in maintaining it.

It is pretended, that submission to legislative authority forbids all examination and reasoning; but do not the interested priests of all the religions on earth pretend to possess this authority? Does it not equally belong to the Bramins, the Telapoins, the Bonzes, the Molochs, as well as to the ministers of Christianity?

To be continued.

GABRIEL'S WING.

We extract the following story from the "Life of Joanna, Queen of Naples:"—One Sunday morning, when all the inhabitants of the neighboring hamlets had assembled at the church of Certaldo, Father Cipolla reminded them of their annual contributions to the poor of *the lord baron, St. Anthony*, which procure for their flocks and herds the peculiar protection of the blessed saint, and promised, as a special favor, to show to all the devout who would assemble before the church that day at the ninth hour, a feather of the angel Gabriel's wing, which he dropped in the chamber of the Virgin at the Annunciation. Among the auditors of Cipolla were two of his friends and jovial companions, who had often laughed at his public exhibitions of relics; and now wishing to see how he would extricate himself from the embarrassment, managed, whilst he dined and slept at the inn of the village, to take the feather out of his casket, and fill it with cinders. The precious relic had been recently drawn from the tail of a parrot, a bird little known in Tuscany, and which had never been heard of at Certaldo.

At the appointed hour the whole country assembled before the church. The unsuspecting friar began his verbose sermon, made his confession,

lighted two tapers, put off his hood, opened his vest, took out the casket, blessed it, and after a few words in praise of the angel Gabriel, opened it, and finding it filled with cinders, without the smallest change of countenance, raised his hands to heaven, thanked God, and closing it again, addressed the multitude. He then related to them a fictitious journey to Jerusalem, where the holy patriarch had shown him all his sacred treasury of relics, amongst others, the toupet of the seraphim that appeared to Saint Francis, a nail of a cherubim, some of the garments of the holy catholic faith, a few of the rays of the star which appeared to the magi in the East, a little of the sound of the bells of Solomon's Temple in a vial, that plume of the angelic wing he had already told them of, and a few of the coals with which the blessed martyr, St. Laurence, had been roasted. The benevolent patriarch, in reward of Cipolla's pilgrimage, gave him the sacred feather and cinders at parting. These he placed in separate caskets, lest the holy coals should soil the angelic plume; but the caskets were so alike, that he often mistook the one for the other, as in the present instance, by the express interposition of Providence. The feast of St. Laurence would arrive in two days; the blessed cinders were sent to rekindle the flame of devotion in their hearts. "To this end, therefore," continued he, "blessed children, reverently uncover your heads, and devoutly behold them; and whosoever shall be marked by them with the sign of the cross, shall be unhurt by fire for one year." As soon as he had sang a hymn in praise of St. Laurence, the credulous multitude crowded round him to gaze on the casket with stupid wonder, and to have their white shirts, vests, and veils marked with large black crosses, the friar telling them, the more he used of the cinders, the more they grew in the casket, as he had often proved. When all was over, the two roguish youths laughed with Cipolla at the trick they had played him, and praising his dexterity, gave him back the parrot's feather, which served him as well the following year.

SATAN VS. THE HUMAN RACE.

Among the works of Bartholus is found a curious tract, which had astonishing success at the period of its composition, and though more technically learned, was but an imitation of many of the poetical, but we must say, profane pleadings of the troubadours of Provence. The tract in question is a cause pleaded in form before Christ—Satan versus The Human Race—Cacœdæmon, the Satanic prothonotary, pleads on one side, and the Virgin Mary on the other. All the regular forms of law are observed. In fine, the judge pronounces the sentence in his tribunal at the bar of the court of justice, above the thrones of the angels in his celestial palace, after having examined all the citations, procurations; allegations, replies, exceptions, and rejoinders. The sentence is written and published by St. John the Evangelist, notary to the angelic court, as Cacœdæmon is to the infernal!—*Ginguene, Hist. Littéraire.*

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